

The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

2

10 April 1981

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable James A. Baker III
Chief of Staff and Assistant
to the President

FROM: William J. Casey

SUBJECT: Events in the Situation Room on
30 March 1981

1. I was called out of a meeting at 2:40 p.m. on Monday, 30 March, to be informed that the President had been shot at but he had not been hit, and that he had been taken away from the scene of the shooting safely but that three other men had been hurt. Almost immediately, Dick Allen called and asked me to come over to the Situation Room at the White House right away. I left immediately. It took about twenty minutes to get across the river and reach the Situation Room. There I learned that the President had been taken to George Washington Hospital. I learned also that Jim Brady had been hit in the head and that a Secret Service man and a Washington policeman had been hit and were in the hospital.

2. When I arrived, the Secretary of State, the Attorney General, the Secretary of Defense, Dick Allen, the Secretary of the Treasury, and the Counsellor to the President were there. The Attorney General reported the assailant's name and said that he came from Evergreen, Colorado. I called John McMahon, CIA's Deputy Director for Operations, to ask that a name check be made on John W. Hinckley, Evergreen, Colorado, and asked that any indication of follow-up activities or reaction to the shooting that came in from our forces around the world be phoned in to me in the Situation Room. We informed the Secret Service that CIA had no information on Hinckley. In addition, CIA sent a flash message worldwide asking for any information that might bear on the assassination attempt. Responses were passed immediately to the Secret Service and FBI unevaluated. The Secretary of State was the senior Cabinet officer present and functioned as chairman and sought to maintain order in the discussion. This seemed to be by common consent. He and Jim Baker at the hospital were the contact points between the Cabinet and the developments at the hospital.

3. The Secretary of Defense consulted with those gathered in the Situation Room as to what should be done about putting our military forces on alert and took responsibility for any steps that were called for in that respect. Notification of the families of the victims, arranging for their

transportation needs, and housekeeping details were assigned to various staff members at the White House. Fred Fielding joined the Attorney General in advising with respect to the legal questions that could develop. The Vice President had already been notified in Fort Worth where he was making a speech, and arrangements had been made to fly him as soon as possible to Andrews.

4. There was considerable discussion about how best to walk a line between providing information soon enough and fully enough to maintain public calm and confidence and taking the time to get confirmation and avoid disseminating rumors or otherwise confuse the public. Larry Speakes was dealing with the press over in the West Wing of the White House and was sparring questions and answers back and forth--more questions than answers. At one point in the Situation Room there was surprise that Larry Speakes appeared on the television screen to answer questions put to him by reporters in the press room. It was the general feeling that this was a mistake which was intensified when he found himself over his head in dealing with questions related to succession and command. The Secretary of State left the Situation Room to appear alongside Speakes on the television screen. I was sitting next to the Secretary of State and I believe this was a spontaneous, useful and proper response. It was the common conception that Speakes' inability to deal with the questions being put to him was likely to contribute to concern among what had to be a large number of television viewers at that time.

5. Throughout the afternoon there was general agreement our purpose was to see that the government carried on business as usual. During the course of the afternoon, Drew Lewis, John Block, and other Cabinet members joined the group. There was discussion as to the character and range of information the Vice President would want when he arrived and efforts were made to provide this. When the Vice President did arrive, he quickly made it clear that the only role he wanted to play was to support the President and see that business was carried on, see that the President was fully and properly advised, and protocol obligations met for the President.


William J. Casey

cc: Craig Fuller, Deputy Assistant to the President
and Director of Cabinet Administration

1981 APR 13 1981